DRUGS USED AT HUDSON BAY IN 1730

During its tercentenary exhibition, which was held at Beaver House in London in 1970, the Hudson's Bay Company placed on view a reproduction of a drug list compiled by Giles Wills, one of the company's surgeons at Fort Albany on James Bay (the southern extension of Hudson Bay) in 1730. The company through its archivist, Mrs. J. Craig, has kindly furnished a photostatic copy of the list and has graciously permitted it to be published.

The post at Fort Albany (about 50° N, 82° W.) was established very early in the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, before 1679. From 1679 to 1714 it was the sole post occupied by the company but during part of this time, from 1686 to 1693, it was in the hands of the French.[1] By the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) Great Britain secured recognition of its claims to the Hudson Bay region and the French were excluded.[2]

Surgeon Giles Wills does not figure prominently in available published materials. A letter is extant which was written from Albany Fort on August 14, 1732, by Joseph Adams, commander of the post; this states that Wills had been sent home.[3] Perhaps his contract had expired.

In placing the drug list before our readers I have replaced the old symbols for drams and ounces but have avoided making alterations in the punctuation and spelling. Where an abbreviation has been expanded, this is signified by square brackets.

The list is to be found in the company's archives (Albany miscellaneous papers, H.B.C. Arch. B. 3/z/2, fo. 4-4d).

Surgeon Wills' Inventory

The following Medicines remain at Fort Albany: viz.

Empl:	Epispastic	lib ss
	Oxycrot:	lib ss

1. Rich, E. E.: *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870.* London, Hudson's Bay Record Soc., 1958-1959, vol. 1, pp. 81, 349, 503.
2. Brebner, J. B.: *The Explorers of North America.* London, Black, 1933, p. 290.
3. Davies, K. G., ed.: *Letters from Hudson Bay, 1703-40.* London, Hudson's Bay Record Soc., 1965, pp. 164-68.

	Diach[ylon]c gummi	lib ss
	Melilot	lib i
Bals:	Locatelli	lib i ss
	Sulphur: Simp:	oz. 6
	Sulphur: anisi	oz. 4
	Copaibae	oz. 4
Ungt:	Apostolorum,	lib i ss
	Diapompholigos;	lib i ss
	Althaeae;	lib i ss
	nicotianae;	lib ss
Ol:	rosarum;	lib i
	Chamomeli;	lib i
	Hyperice;	lib i
	flor: Sambuci	lib ii
	Amigdilar: Dulc:	oz. 4
	Lillior alb:	oz. 4
Chyma:	Succini;	oz i
	anisi;	oz ss
	Cariophyllor:	dr. ii
Rad:	Gentian:	lib i
	althaeae;	lib i
	Chinae;	lib ss
	Serpent: virg:	oz 4
	Ipecacuanhae;	oz 4
	Ellebor: alb:	lib ss
Folio:	Menthae	lib ss
	Salviae rub:	lib ss
Herbs:	Pectoral:	lib ss
	Enematibus;	lib ss
Cons:	Cydonior:	lib ss
	rosarum rub:	oz 4
Semen:	Carui	oz 4
	foeniculi	oz 4
	Cymini,	oz ii
	anisi;	oz ii
Spt:	Sal: armoniac:	oz 6
	Cornu Cervi;	oz ii
	Sal: volatile;	oz ss

Aq:	Raphan: Compos:	lib i
Elixir Salutis		lib ii
Tinct:	mart: mynch:	oz ii
Pull:	Cornu cervi ust;	lib 3
	Enulae Camp[anae]	lib i
	glycyrrhizae;	lib ss
	Jallappae;	oz iii
	ad guttetam;	oz i
Gummi:	ammoniac:	oz ii
	gambog:	oz i
	Scammonii	oz ss
	aloes succotr:	oz i
	guaiac:	oz i
Lap:	Prunellae;	oz iii
	Hybernicus:	oz i
Ras:	Cornu Cervi;	lib i
	Sassafras	lib ii
Cort[ex] Peruvian:		lib iss
Hord[eum] Perlat:		lib i
mel; anglican:		lib ii
manna;		lib ii
Cremor: Tarter:		lib ss
arsenicum;		lib 3
Bacc: Lauri;		oz 4
Thus;		oz ii
Cubebs;		oz 4
vitrioli alb:		oz iii
vitrioli romanum;		oz ii
Sperma Ceti;		oz ii
Diaphoret: antimon:		oz ss
Occulum; 6/9 [cancrorum]		oz iii
Tarter: vetrioli;		oz ii
precipitat: virid:		oz ss
Callomel; pp:		dr. ii
Laud: Liquid: C Spt: nitri: Dulc:		oz i
Porrengers;		no. 2
morters; Ditto		

funnels; Ditto;
one urinal
one Clyster Syringe
Weights & Scale
a Set of Cappitell Instruments

pr me GILES WILLS

pr me GILES WILLS
July the 23d: 1730;

Nearly every one of these preparations presents aspects that attract attention or deserve study. Since limitation of space prevents discussion of all, only a few have been selected for comment. The following remarks are arranged in the same order as Giles Wills' list.

The plasters represent an entire category that has almost disappeared from contemporary practice, and this is mostly a loss to the patient. The *emplastrum epispasticum*, a vesicant we can afford to do without, contained burgundy pitch, yellow wax, Venice turpentine, mustard seed, pepper, verdigris, and cantharides.[4] The *emplastrum croceum vulgo oxycroceum*, or saffron plaster, is described in the *Edinburgh New Dispensatory* of 1786[5] in Caledonian terms as an "infrugal and injudicious composition," which was said to strengthen the parts to which it was applied, and to resolve cold [scrofulous?] tumors. Diachylon, also called *emplastrum commune* or common plaster, was made by the prolonged boiling of litharge (lead monoxide), olive oil, and water,[6] and hence consisted essentially of lead oleate. This plaster was applied to flesh wounds. Ordinarily the chief sufferer was probably the pharmacist. *Emplastrum melilot*, euphoniously named, was made from sweet clover.

Ointments have suffered less from obsolescence than plasters, but all the ointments in Wills' list are unfamiliar. *Unguentum Apostolorum*[7] included, *inter alia*, turpentine, wax, litharge, myrrh, and opoponax. It was used in the treatment of obstinate ulcers. *Unguentum diapompholigos* contained, in addition to juice of berries of the deadly

4. *Edinburgh New Dispensatory*. Edinburgh, Elliot, 1786, p. 659.
5. Op. cit., p. 655.
6. Op. cit., pp. 653-54.
7. Jungken, J. H.: *Lexicon Chymico-Pharmaceuticum*, 3d ed. Nuremberg, Rüdiger, 1729, vol. 2, p. 418.

nightshade (belladonna), white lead, burned lead, and pompholyx.[8] The latter term referred not to a bullous disease of the skin but to a kind of impure zinc oxide. This preparation was applied to ulcers; it became obsolete in the 18th century.

The *Edinburgh New Dispensary*[9] says that tobacco "is sometimes used externally in unguents, for destroying cutaneous insects, cleansing old ulcers, &c." This doubtless accounts for the inclusion of *unguentum nicotianae* in the list.

Radix althaeae, the root of the marshmallow, has suffered unwarranted banishment from modern practice. Many years ago, on the advice of an older doctor, I prescribed the decoction, which soothed an inflamed throat. But one must no longer prescribe what no pharmacist can prepare.

The *pulvis ad guttetam*, also called epileptic powder, was an anticonvulsant composed of pulverized wild valerian root and peony root in equal parts; earlier versions contained various other ingredients. The *lapis Hybernicus* or Irish stone is described[10] as a blackish fossil stone, consisting of an argillaceous earth, slightly impregnated with sulphur and iron.

Guaiac nowadays is used as a reagent. In the 16th and later centuries it was believed to be a diaphoretic. Hence it was used for fevers and also was for many years part of the standard treatment for syphilis.

The inclusion of Peruvian bark among drugs used in Canada may signify that some of the company's employees had had malaria, acquired in other countries, but more probably it indicates that the bark was used for fevers of various kinds and that malaria had not yet emerged as a fully defined and clearly differentiated entity.

Peruvian bark is one of the few drugs in Wills' list that is still included in some form in our present repertoire. A few substances, such as calomel, are near the end of their vogue. A few others appear in contemporary cosmetics (spermaceti, oleum rosarum); a few, such as fennel and anise, are used as kitchen herbs or as flavors; and at least one—gentian—is included in beverages. Most of the remaining preparations have vanished into oblivion.

S.J.

8. *Edinburgh New Dispensatory*, 1786, p. 665.
9. *Edinburgh New Dispensatory*, p. 186.
10. *Edinburgh New Dispensatory*, pp. 155-56.